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Effectiveness of Digital Marketing on the Promotion of the Botswana Human Resource Development Council's (HRDC) Services

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ABSTRACT

Since 2015, Botswana Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) has been using digital marketing platforms to promote its services and reach out to its stakeholders, customers and clients. This was meant to augment traditional marketing platforms such as television, radio and newspapers, which were not reaching out to all stakeholders due to geographical spread. As a result, the Botswana HRDC decided to incorporate digital marketing in its Marketing Communications Strategy. After this shift, it became necessary to know whether digital marketing platforms, mainly Facebook and Twitter, were achieving the intended results. The study sought to investigate the effectiveness and efficiency of digital marketing on the promotion of Botswana HRDC's services. The study targeted Botswana HRDC stakeholders, customers and clients. A mixed-methods research approach was used. Purposive sampling was used to select 420 respondents, of which 348 answered a questionnaire, while 26 participated in interviews, and two focus–group discussions were conducted with seven and 13 respondents, respectively. The response rate was 82.4 per cent. The findings suggest that participants generally preferred to use digital marketing; however, due to the unaffordability of data to some and inaccessibility of the internet in rural areas, some still preferred traditional marketing platforms. The findings also showed a relationship between the use of digital marketing platforms and the type of stakeholder, age, position, location and level of education. The findings further recommended the use of Instagram, WhatsApp and Pinterest. The significance of this study is that the research findings inform Botswana HRDC on how to plan for its next strategic plan of 2021–2026 on digital capacity building, agility, management, budgeting and how best to exploit digital marketing for reaching out to all types of stakeholders.

Keywords: *Digital Marketing Effectiveness, Social Media, Facebook, Traditional Marketing, Twitter, Stakeholders*

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Introduction

Inarguably the world has transformed globally due to everyday technological advancements that continue to enhance our business. Ul Haq and Awan (2020) confirmed that the ongoing developments in information and communication technologies (ICT) have changed the way of doing business. The world has gone digital and so is the corporate world which continues to take advantage of technology to make their products and services more competitive through the use of digital marketing platforms.

Johnson (2021) affirmed that almost 5 billion people were active internet users as of October 2020, namely 59 per cent of the world's population. Mobile technology has now become the most important means of access to the internet worldwide as mobile internet users account for 91 per cent of the total number of internet users. Ng'ang'a (2015) supported the view that the developments in internet technology have reduced the costs of delivery of both products and services and have reduced geographical boundaries in bringing buyers and sellers together, making the cost of doing business more cost-effective and efficient.

Like other organisations around the globe, Botswana Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) has also taken advantage of the technology advancements by using digital marketing channels to communicate messages and to market the human resource development (HRD) services it is mandated to offer on behalf of the Government of Botswana. It is worth noting that when the products and services are more competitive, they attract the attention of valued targeted stakeholders, customers and clients. Digital marketing, especially social media (Facebook and Twitter) and the website, has assisted many businesses like Botswana HRDC to effectively communicate with customers and clients and advertises its products and services.

Tabrizi et al. (2019) stated that digital transformation projects have assisted companies to enhance their competitiveness. Botswana HRDC has in the past invested in ICT systems and improved its processes to improve service delivery and customer service. In a bid to remain digitally relevant to its online stakeholders, customers and clients, Botswana HRDC started using digital marketing platforms websites and Social Media (Facebook and Twitter) to promote its services. Hence, the study seeks to interrogate the effectiveness of digital marketing in promoting its products and services for the past six (6) years.

Statement of the problem

In discussing the effectiveness of digital marketing, Kotler (2016), an expert on digital marketing, maintains that marketing today is going through a digital revolution that has made it possible for consumers to look for information about a company or organisation, its products, social responsibility and the ratings of its products. Consumers can now go onto Facebook and Twitter to exchange views about the quality of a product and check the prices of rival brands and their quality, which puts them in a better position to make informed decisions. For example, a consumer can be in a shop to buy a certain product but can quickly check from their smartphone whether a better price is being offered elsewhere. Although access to and use of social media has radically transformed the promotion of goods and services, the problem is that the implications of digital marketing have not yet been carefully considered.

In the case of the Botswana HRDC, it is through digital marketing that the organisation is now able to link with its clients, customers and stakeholders to whom it provides valuable services. Yet Botswana HRDC still does not know the exact effectiveness of digital

marketing on the promotion of its services and what can be done to improve the marketing thereof.

Until recently, the Botswana HRDC had been using traditional marketing methods such as posters and flyers to promote its services until it decided to switch to digital marketing platforms such as social media. Even though the internet is only part of the Botswana HRDC's marketing bouquet, Samiee (2018) advised that an organisation should promote its activities by creating a website that provides all the required information. Wymbs (2011) contended that in the digital world in which we now live, the use of digital marketing is an ideal way to get in touch with customers, particularly those who are able to use digital gadgets. According to Sinan Soft (2018), despite the risk of hacking and spreading malicious information, the main advantage of digital marketing is that it is more personalised and can reach different kinds of customers at any time of the day for an affordable price, unlike television or print advertising which are more expensive and lack the human touch.

Word-of-mouth appears to shape consumer images of brands in terms of both what to buy and how much to pay. Kotler (2009) claimed that new digital technologies had turned most of the traditional principles of marketing upside down. The development of social media technologies like Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Snapchat and YouTube are radically transforming the way goods and services are marketed. Some of the new developments in marketing such as co-creation, crowd-sourcing, dynamic pricing, digital marketing, marketing automation and growth strategies are being driven by digital technologies (Lies, 2019).

Pagani and Pardo (2017) contended that digital marketing has a profound effect on interpersonal communication, which helps to create new business opportunities in places that are far away. Nizar and Janathanan (2018) advised that when marketing goods and services, it is necessary to understand the customers' behaviour; a view which is shared by Malik et al. (2013), who pointed out that consumer behaviour is influenced by the brand of the goods and services as well as the customers' ability to access the various forms of social media. For marketing purposes, Malik et al. (2013) concluded that a positive perception of the brand, coupled with a strong brand image, influenced a consumer's loyalty to a particular brand. Therefore, the Botswana HRDC needs to convey the right messages using the right marketing platforms in order to attract loyalty; and this can only be done by using marketing strategies whose effectiveness is supported by empirical evidence.

Hanna et al. (2011) noted that a unique aspect of social media is its unlimited interactivity that has revolutionised marketing practices such as advertising and promotion. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) acknowledged the fact that there are definite advantages in using social media for marketing purposes because producers are easily connected with consumers, sellers with buyers, colleges and universities with students and organisations with clients and stakeholders. Mersey et al. (2010) reminded us that in the highly competitive business environment where customers' loyalty can change in a split second, it is necessary to market the right brand of particular products and services. Yet to assume that digital marketing alone is a panacea for all our marketing needs is probably naïve: Botswana HRDC needs to assess first whether digital marketing is effective in reaching out to clients, customers and stakeholders before adopting it.

According to Khan et al. (2013), digital marketing is now widely used throughout the world, and at the moment, platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, Google and other social media are radically transforming the attitudes of

consumers. Social media platforms have also irrevocably changed the way manufacturers and organisations sell their goods and services. In the case of the Botswana HRDC, digital marketing platforms have become important channels for marketing its services. Yet to the best knowledge of this researcher, little or no research on digital marketing has ever been conducted in Botswana to establish its effectiveness in marketing products, goods and services to a range of clients, customers and stakeholders. This present study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap in our knowledge of digital marketing by using the Botswana HRDC as a case study to understand the effectiveness of digital marketing.

Research objectives

- To investigate the effectiveness of digital marketing in promoting the Botswana HRDC's services to its valued clients, customers and stakeholders.
- To examine the efficiency of digital marketing compared to other forms of marketing.
- To recommend interventions that can be implemented to improve the use of digital marketing at Botswana HRDC.

Research questions

- How effective is digital marketing in promoting the Botswana HRDC's services to its valued stakeholders, customers and clients?
- How efficient is digital marketing compared to other forms of marketing?
- What interventions can be put in place to improve the use of digital marketing at the Botswana HRDC?

Research methodology

The research methodology for this study entailed the research design (qualitative and quantitative), research philosophy, methods used to collect data, sample and sampling and research framework. The use of multiple research strategies was dictated by the non-experimental or applied nature of the research, which calls for the use of a variety of research methods in order to produce detailed explanations of the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies used for the promotion of the services of the Botswana HRDC. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, the researcher complemented quantitative with qualitative research methods by purposively selecting 420 informants who were all issued research questionnaires (qualitative and quantitative) while 26 were interviewed as individuals and 18 formed part of the two focus-group discussions. Determination of the sample framework and determination of the sample size informed the sampling framework. The study was piloted using 16 study sample representatives who were later excluded. Data was collected through questionnaires, interviews and focus-group discussions mainly because they focus on a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon *in situ*, which means getting information 'straight from the horse's mouth'.

The purpose of using interviews was to find more information on the effectiveness and efficiency of digital marketing. The overarching justification for using mixed methodology was for them to complement each other. Qualitative methods, unlike quantitative methods, tend to lose the social and institutional context of data, while qualitative techniques focus on the 'how' and 'why' part of the data, thus fully answering the questions since digital

marketing is a recent phenomenon in Botswana. This study is based on the research objectives and questions; hence, it is descriptive and narrative in its nature.

The present study ensured that the sample size was large enough to yield reliable and credible information to address the objectives of the study. The precision levels of this sample size were subjected to a standard error and confidence interval calculation. Field (2000) contended that a standard error is a way of measuring how well the sample represents the larger population which gives an idea of the extent to which the sample is typical. The approach employed to assess the accuracy of the sample was to calculate the confidence intervals, which indicated the range of the value within which the population for the study fell.

After reaching the final sample size, the study then employed the generic sample size as calculated below:

$$n_* = \frac{z^2_{\alpha/2} p(1-p)}{e^2}$$

$$n_* = \frac{1.96^2 * 0.5(1-0.5)}{0.045^2} = \approx 420$$

Where:

- n_* is the estimated sample size
- Z_α is a standard normal univariate value of Z which provides a .95% confidence interval
- Alpha (α) specifies the probability of declaring a difference to be statistically significant when no real difference exists in the population.
- p is the predicted or anticipated prevalence (coverage rate) for the key indicator, which is based on the smallest targeted group in terms of its proportion of the total population and $p = 0.5$ was used to calculate the maximum error.
- e was the allowable error to be tolerated for the purpose of conducting this study.

The formula yielded a sample size of 420 to be used for this study.

The following is the associated standard error and confidence interval for the sample size:

i. S.E = $\sqrt{\frac{p(1-p)}{n}} = \sqrt{\frac{0.5(1-0.5)}{420}} = 0.024$. This is a small standard error indicating that the sample was likely to give an accurate reflection of the wider population.

ii. C.I = $p \pm 1.96 * \sqrt{\frac{p(1-p)}{n}} = 0.5 \pm 1.96 * 0.024 = (0.45, 0.55)$. The 95% confidence interval is small, which means that the mean accurately represented the sample. The total sample is shown below and how it was spread.

Table 1. Sample from each organisation

Type of organisation in the sample	Frequency
HRDC Staff	70
Education and Training Providers	70
Training Levy Payers	70
Government (Ministries, Departments & Parastatals)	70
Learners	70
Media	70
Total Sample	420

Data analysis and interpretation

In this study, the effectiveness and efficiency of digital marketing for the promotion of Botswana HRDC was measured through the help of demographic factors that influence the use of digital or traditional marketing platforms such as the age of the respondents, their qualifications, experience, location, the type of organisations they worked for, the marketing platforms they mostly preferred and the frequency of use. It further provides a multivariate analysis of variance as well as a statistical calculation of the effect of each marketing method vis-à-vis demographic variables. It concludes by calculating the Pearson Correlation coefficient between dependent variables (effectiveness and efficiency) and independent variable (digital marketing).

Digital marketing (social media) platform used

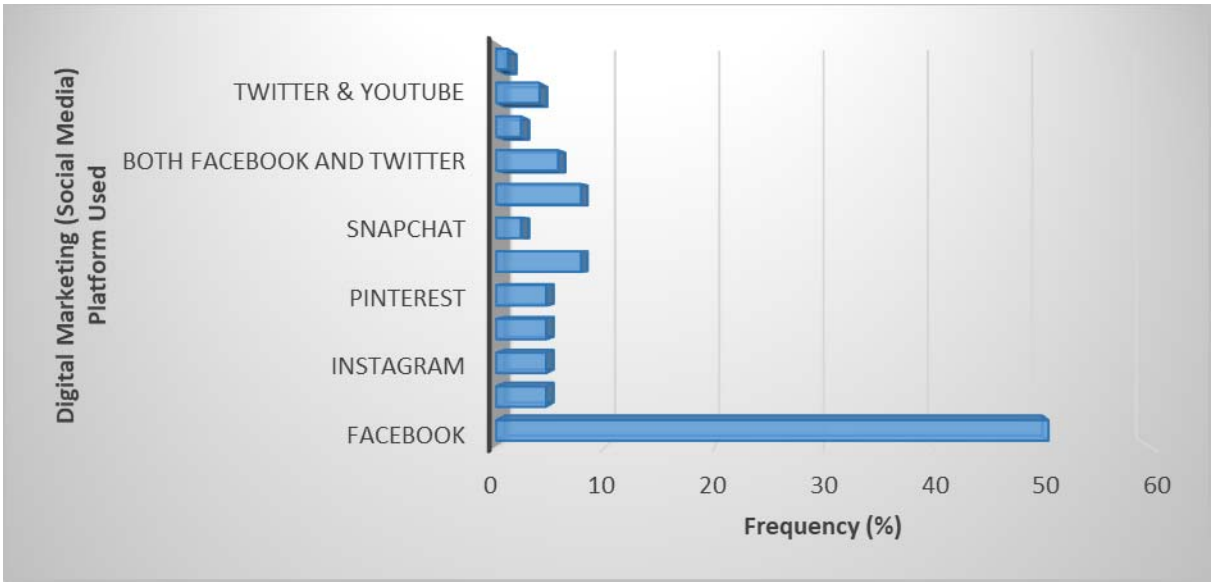

Figure 1: Digital Marketing (Social Media) Platform Used

Figure 1 shows that the majority of the respondents (176 or 50.6 per cent) preferred using Facebook, followed by YouTube at 10 per cent. Those who stated that they used other platforms were 27 or 7.8 per cent. They were followed by those who preferred using both Facebook and Twitter, who were 20 or 5.7 per cent. Those who preferred using Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Pinterest were 16 or 4.6 per cent each. The preference for Facebook can perhaps be attributed to its popularity and its interactivity compared to other platforms. Facebook is also known to be a cost-effective platform without a word count limit where one can upload pictures and videos. The other advantage is that one can easily interact with stakeholders, customers and clients and target a particular age group and gender. What should be noted, however, is that Facebook has attributes similar to other digital marketing platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram but is more popular because it has functions that are easy to apply. Based on the aforementioned, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness have implications for stakeholders' attitudes and behavioural intentions.

Preferred method of marketing

With regard to the method of marketing, Figure 2 shows that 191 or 55 per cent of the respondents preferred to use digital marketing as opposed to 104 or 30 per cent who preferred to use both traditional and digital marketing. Only 45 or 13 per cent preferred to use

traditional methods such as advertising on television, radio, newspapers and billboards. What this data means is that the choice of a particular method was probably influenced by the method respondents were used to and their cost-effectiveness. For instance, those who preferred digital marketing did so, perhaps because it had a greater impact on their businesses.

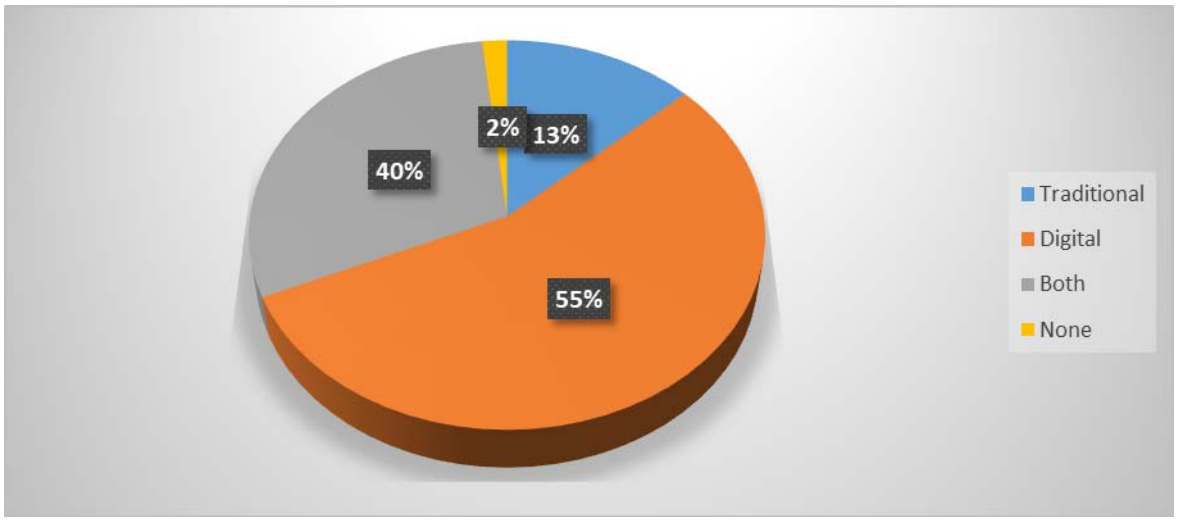

Figure 2: Preferred method of marketing

Also, they probably chose it because of the instant feedback they received and their ability to interact with stakeholders, customers and clients. The increased use of digital marketing platforms could also be related to the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to engage stakeholders virtually with implications for conative, cognitive and affective dynamics. What should be noted, however, is that those who preferred to use other marketing methods (45 per cent) did so probably because they were conscious of the fact that different methods appeal to different people. Moreover, in a vast country such as Botswana, some of the respondents were perhaps aware of the lack of connectivity in many remote areas and the dangers and risks of using social media such as hacking and scams that are the bane of digital technology.

Effectiveness of digital marketing

Effectiveness of digital marketing essentially means the efficacy or the ability of the digital marketing platforms used to promote the services of the Botswana HRDC, that is, whether there are any benefits derived from utilising them. Regarding the crucial question about the effectiveness of digital marketing platforms used by the Botswana HRDC, Figure 3 shows that the majority of the respondents either 'agreed' (54.9 per cent) or 'strongly agreed' (24.1 per cent) that the use of digital marketing platforms met their expectations, with 275 or 79 per cent indicating that the platforms provided adequate content. As to whether the Botswana HRDC's digital marketing platforms provide up-to-date content, 266 or 76.5 per cent of the respondents agreed, which almost equalled the number of those who agreed that the Botswana HRDC's digital marketing platforms met their expectations. Similarly, the respondents, by and large, agreed that the digital marketing platforms used by the Botswana HRDC provided timely, interactive and user-friendly responses. But when it came to the issue of its cost-effectiveness, there was a much lower rating of 42.2 per cent for those who agreed and 42.0 per cent for those who strongly agreed. The number of those who disagreed about the effectiveness of digital marketing was significantly noticeable, especially regarding

the timely response of the council, the interactivity of the marketing platforms, meeting the expectations of the clients, the provision of up-to-date content, the adequacy of the content, its user-friendliness and cost-effectiveness.

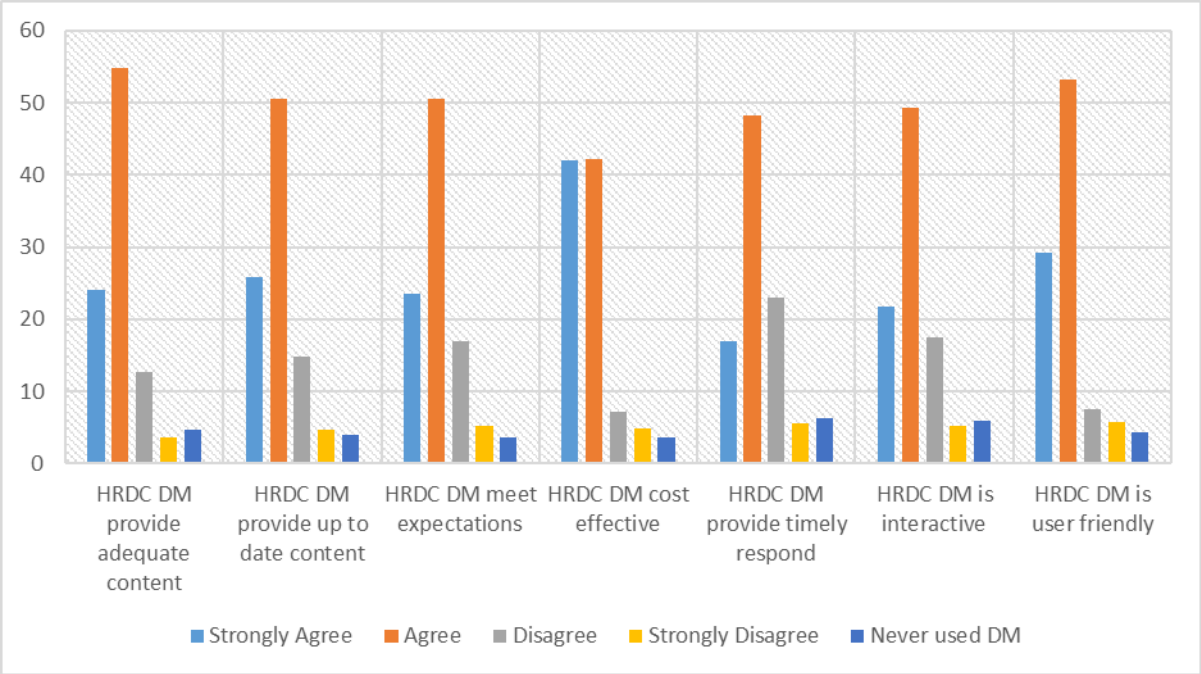

Figure 3: Effectiveness of Botswana HRDC's digital marketing platforms

In order to support the quantitative information on the effectiveness of digital marketing, the researcher conducted both individual and focus group interviews. Individual interviews involved 26 informants from different government ministries and departments, parastatals, public service organisations, public and private tertiary institutions and private organisations. Altogether 15 men and 11 women respondents were interviewed in their offices or at convenient places which were free from distractions. The individual interviews lasted from a minimum of 10 minutes to a maximum of 46 minutes.

Two focus-group discussions were conducted to obtain more insights on the subject matter under investigation. The first focus-group discussion, consisting of education and training providers' Marketing Communications Managers, Enrolment and Admissions Managers, comprised seven informants being four (4) men and three (3) women and lasted about one and a half hours. The second focus-group discussion comprised Botswana HRDC employees across different levels such as managers, assistant managers, technical, officers and temporary officers. Altogether there were twelve (12) informants (six (6) men and six (6) women), and the discussion lasted for about two hours.

The different views held by the interviewees regarding the effectiveness of digital marketing emphasise one important point: different digital platforms have a different appeal, and it is perhaps unhelpful to give a blanket answer about its effectiveness because it depends on the platform that is being used. What should be noted, however, is that there is no 'one shoe fits all' in terms of the effectiveness of digital marketing: what works well for other sectors or workplaces may not necessarily work the same way for service-oriented organisations such as the Botswana HRDC, government departments, public or private institutions because their core business is different.

The efficiency of digital marketing

The efficiency of digital marketing means the extent to which the digital marketing platforms (Facebook and Twitter) are raising awareness regarding Botswana HRDC's services, thereby generating leads and reducing marketing costs. Regarding the efficiency of the Botswana HRDC's digital marketing platforms, Figure 4 shows that, by and large, the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that digital marketing is efficient. Most notable was the assertion that 'digital marketing platforms have helped to build relationships with clients, customers and stakeholders, with 284 or 81.6 per cent agreeing and strongly agreeing. Regarding the respondents' perception of the criticality of digital marketing and its ability to disseminate information, those who agreed and strongly agreed were almost equal.

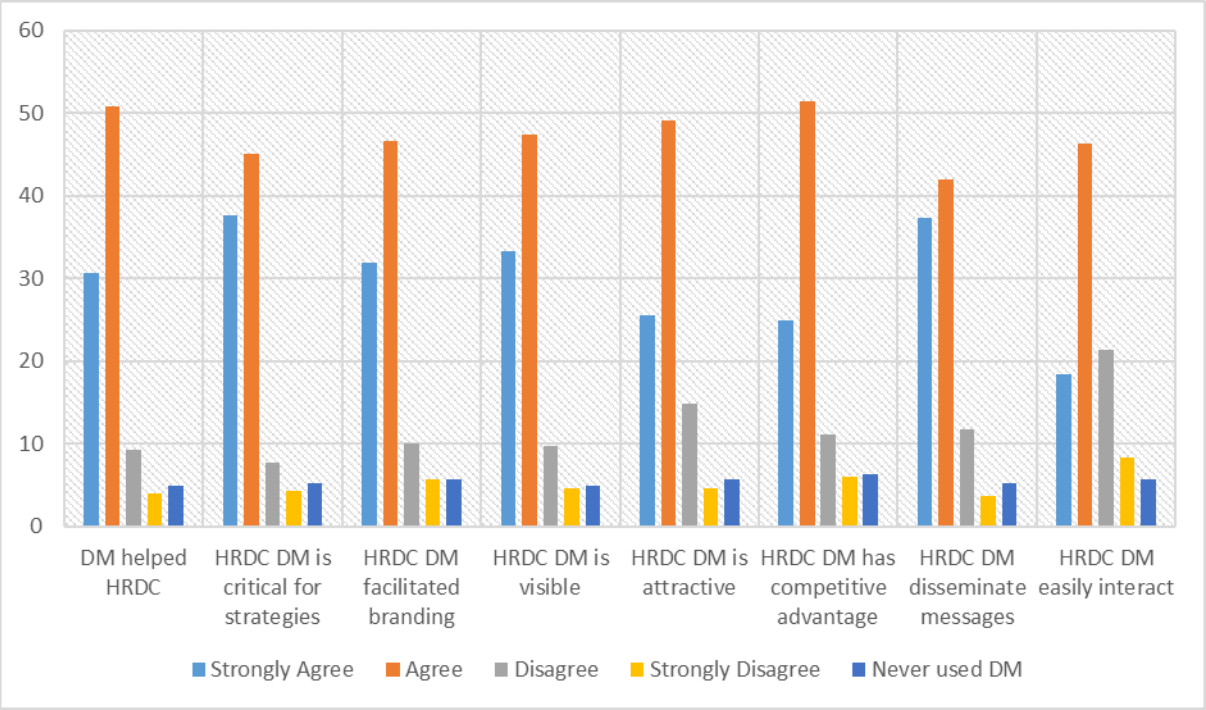

Figure 4. The Efficiency of Botswana HRDC's Digital Marketing Platforms

As for the promotion of the HRDC brand, Figure 4clearly shows that most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that digital marketing Promotion of Botswana HRDC brand (273 or 78.5 per cent), improved visibility (281 or 80.7 per cent), attractiveness (260 or 74.7 per cent), competitiveness (266 or 76.4 per cent) and the interactivity of the content (225 or 79.3 per cent). However, a significant number disagreed, especially about the interactivity (64 or 18.4and attractiveness (89 or 25.6 per cent) of the digital marketing platforms. Although few, there were some respondents who strongly disagreed (139 or 39.9 per cent) or had never used digital marketing platforms (128 or 36.78 per cent). These are perhaps the people who are not so digitally inclined, especially those who live in remote areas of the country where there is no internet connectivity.

In order to corroborate the veracity of the quantitative data, which generally indicated that digital marketing is efficient, the researcher interviewed some informants regarding what they thought about the efficiency of digital marketing in promoting services.

In a nutshell, the respondents' favourable comments point to the fact that the digital marketing platforms used by the Botswana HRDC are generally efficient and have helped to build a healthy relationship with stakeholders, customers and clients. Also, the efficiency of

digital marketing has increased the visibility of the Botswana HRDC as a brand and has added value to the services that are rendered to the wider community.

The findings of this present study suggest that, notwithstanding the respondents' divergent opinions about what "effectiveness" actually entails, the digital marketing platforms used by the Botswana HRDC are effective. Regarding the efficiency of the social media platforms used by the Botswana HRDC, the findings similarly suggest that, despite the dissenting voices of a minority, they are quite effective and efficient.

The empirical study found that digital marketing is very effective in promoting services. The study further found that digital marketing platforms have helped to build relationships with clients, customers and stakeholders through effectiveness and efficiency via digital marketing strategies. The strategies are critical for target market engagement through the use of consistent messages using relevant tools and media.

Table 2 shows the results of correlation between variables.

Table 2. Digital Marketing Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)

		Digital Marketing	Effectiveness	Efficiency
Digital Marketing	r	1	.865**	.907**
Effectiveness	r	.865**	1	.865**
Efficiency	r	.907**	.865**	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2- tailed)

Results and discussions on effectiveness of digital marketing pertaining to pearson correlation coefficient

Table 2 reveals that digital marketing effectiveness is significantly and positively associated with the manner in which digital marketing platforms are used at the Botswana HRDC, where the value $r = 0.865$ at the significance level of $p<0.01$ is two-tailed. Essentially, this implies that Botswana HRDC is able to establish the effectiveness of digital marketing (social media) as it primarily uses Facebook and Twitter to engage with its valued stakeholders, customers and clients to share critical messages affecting them. In the same vein, the value $r = 0.865$ at the significance level of $p<0.01$ indicates that the same platforms are critical as HRDC Botswana's stakeholders, customers and clients are able to use Facebook and Twitter to give feedback to HRDC Botswana, so, it could improve on service delivery. It is clear that the digital marketing platform (Facebook and Twitter) does indeed bolster effectiveness and engagement with its valued clients in Botswana and globally.

The associated relationship also lends credence to the fact that digital marketing is indeed effective. Further, it answers any question that could have arisen from any critical mind questioning whether digital marketing is in fact as good as it is made out to be. Digital marketing usage at Botswana HRDC is effective.

The association between digital marketing (independent variable) and its effectiveness (dependent variable) is also supported by the qualitative findings, which were confirmed by several respondents. This, therefore, means that there is indeed a link between qualitative findings and quantitative findings on this association. Both the qualitative and quantitative findings agree that the digital marketing platforms used by Botswana HRDC are effective as they provide stakeholders, customers and clients with adequate content that is up-to-date and that the platforms meet their expectations. The findings further revealed that the digital marketing platforms are cost-effective and that their enquiries are responded to timeously.

The stakeholders, customers and clients are also able to interact with Botswana HRDC and that the platforms have helped to increase their knowledge of Botswana HRDC services. They further revealed the user-friendliness of the Facebook and Twitter platforms as another element, proving that the platforms are effective.

Results and discussions on efficiency of digital marketing pertaining to pearson correlation coefficient

Table 2 shows that digital marketing efficiency is significantly and positively associated with the manner in which digital marketing platforms are used by Botswana HRDC, where the value $r = 0.907$ at the significance level of $p< 0.01$ is two-tailed. The significance level proves that digital marketing platforms have helped Botswana HRDC to build relationships with its valued stakeholders, customers and clients. Botswana HRDC has also managed to implement its marketing strategies, thereby corroborating the efficiency of the digital marketing (social media) platforms. The Botswana HRDC digital marketing platforms (Facebook and Twitter) have also facilitated the goal of branding Botswana HRDC digitally. Further, since the value $r = 0.907$ at the significance level of $p<0.01$ indicates that Botswana HRDC is visible digitally and that the same platforms are critical as Botswana HRDC's stakeholders, customers, and clients are using them to get information instantly. The digital marketing platforms have also helped Botswana HRDC to build relationships with its stakeholders, customers and clients. These relations have occasioned contributions from stakeholders, customers and clients on all matters related to HRD systems and policy development, thereby leveraging proficiency. It is clear that the digital marketing platforms (Facebook and Twitter) do indeed bolster effectiveness and engagement with Botswana HRDC's valued clients in Botswana and globally.

Botswana HRDC digital marketing platforms (Facebook and Twitter) are rigorous, as demonstrated by the association. The value $r = 0.907$ at the significance level of $p< 0.01$ is two-tailed. This value lends credibility to the fact that digital marketing is indeed efficient and that it has given Botswana HRDC a competitive advantage. Further, the value confirms that Facebook and Twitter have given Botswana HRDC the competitive advantage as the platforms disseminate messages to larger audiences and that they interact with Botswana HRDC easily, thereby proving their efficiency.

The correlation between digital marketing and its efficiency is also supported by the qualitative findings, which were confirmed by several respondents who unanimously agreed that Botswana HRDC digital Marketing platforms have promoted the brand, that it is visible, attractive, competitive and interactive. This, therefore, means that there is indeed a link between qualitative findings and quantitative findings on this association. The findings of digital marketing platforms in promoting the Botswana HRDC services, focusing on the effectiveness and efficiency of digital marketing**.** In reporting the findings, descriptive statistics are used as well as a critical interpretation of the information proffered by interviewees.

Summary of the findings

The main objective of this present study was to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of digital marketing factors. The ultimate goal was to assist Botswana HRDC to enhance the effectiveness of digital marketing for promoting its services. The study contributes to theory and practice on the effectiveness of digital marketing in the promotion of services.

Interestingly, the findings of this empirical study have several implications for enhancing the effectiveness of digital marketing in the promotion of services. The target population in this study comprised of` Botswana HRDC internal and external stakeholders, namely, Botswana HRDC staff, Education and Training Providers (TEPs), Training Levy Payers, Government Ministries, Departments and Parastatals, Learners and Media.

Moreover, it has the ability to create marketing leads and interaction with stakeholders, customers and clients and gives instant feedback compared to traditional marketing platforms. Respondents revealed that they relied on Botswana HRDC digital marketing (social media) pages, namely, Facebook and Twitter, to get information, make enquiries and to facilitate communication. This demonstrates that digital marketing is essential for business and that it has revolutionised the way of marketing services at Botswana HRDC.

Pertaining to the efficiency of digital marketing, the results show respondents' strong perceptions that digital marketing platforms have helped Botswana HRDC to build relationships with stakeholders, customers and clients. There leads to the conclusion that digital marketing is more efficient, faster (quick notification) and cheaper to use than traditional marketing platforms. Generally, there is a view that digital marketing has proved to have heightened Botswana HRDC's online brand visibility, ultimately adding value to the services rendered to the wider community. This finding highlighted the importance of adopting digital marketing platforms as a tool to market services.

Implications of the findings

The findings of this study indicated that the use of digital marketing to promote services needs careful consideration. This study underlines the importance of a dynamic and multifaceted approach and recommends the effective use of digital marketing through the provision of operational guidance, policy directions and professional practice. The insights based on the perceptions of respondents and a better understanding of the issues raised in the study are essential to enhancing the use of digital marketing. The current study provided considerable evidence demonstrating that digital marketing is essential for business since it has revolutionised the way of marketing services.

Another emerging issue is the upsurge of cybercrime, with fraud, hacking, fake websites, fake digital advertisements, cloning, bugging, intellectual property theft and the spreading of malicious fake news. There is a global scourge of cybercrime, which is ravaging e-commerce, mobile communication, the banking sector, public examinations, general elections and the security of personal data. This calls for Botswana HRDC to be cautious and to further strengthen its Information Technology (IT) security to make the digital marketing platforms secure and safe for users.

The findings of this current study have also shown that the majority of the respondents preferred using digital marketing platforms over traditional marketing platforms. However, organisations that think strategically should not ignore traditional methods of advertising. Instead, they should try to blend digital marketing with traditional campaigns to achieve their intended objectives. Respondents raised the value of investing in content and graphics to enhance the look and feel of advertisements and packaging of messages to boost their attractiveness. Through digital marketing, an organisation can almost immediately view customer response rates and measure the success of a marketing campaign in real-time. Respondents further indicated that digital marketing is a relatively cheaper platform to use for promoting products and services than traditional marketing. It is apparent that organisations

should interrogate their 'break-even point' to ascertain if they are getting their money's worth (digital marketing costs).

The findings of this current study demonstrated the urgent need to develop a digital marketing strategy. This would ensure that digital marketing messages are properly conceptualised with content that is diversified and tailored to the targeted stakeholders, customers and clients. It is also apparent that organisations should employ diversified digital marketing approaches and incorporate traditional 4Ps of marketing mix being place, product/service, promotion and price and customise them for the digital space so that no one is left behind. Respondents further expressed the need to improve packaging content that is engaging and ensure that its quality is of an acceptable standard. This could be achieved through branding Botswana HRDC online by sharing content periodically and driving traffic to its website. The digital marketing improvements constitute content, protocols, target content for digital marketing and leveraging the platforms as well as linking them to an organisation's website. Respondents further called for capacitating Marketing and Communications staff to oversee digital marketing platforms and provide monthly analytics reports and posting schedules.

Limitations of the study

The current study was conducted over a defined time-period, and therefore, captures "snapshot" perspectives for that time phase. Data could have been influenced by events taking place at the time of the survey or during the interviews. The events inevitably shape responses provided by research participants so that the researcher forms a picture that is may not be generalisable to policy contexts. Botswana HRDC has more than 14000 stakeholders, customers and clients spread across different cities, towns and villages across the country. This required a large sample, but due to research budgetary constraints and the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher could not access geographically far-flung respondents. Future studies on the same should ensure that the sample size is large enough to ensure every city, town and village is represented. Even though the research discovered new gaps with reference to prior literature in Botswana, little research has been conducted on the topic in Botswana and regionally. As such, this posed limitations in reference to empirical research material. The researchers experienced many setbacks concerning data collection, as they had to cancel some data collection sessions such as one-on-one-structured interviews and focus-group discussions due to lockdowns and COVID-19 health protocols such as social distancing. This, therefore, meant omitting some of the data collection sessions. The key researcher, is an employee of Botswana HRDC, hence was limited to probe respondents for fear of purported bias, as it was likely to affect the sincerity of the research. In many instances, the researchers had to find research assistants to conduct the interviews and discussions.

Recommendations

Botswana HRDC should invest in the use of digital marketing platforms as they have proven to be cost-effective in comparison to traditional marketing costs. Botswana HRDC will benefit from digital marketing platforms as they are agile and have the ability to sell services to wider audiences across the globe, inculcate engagement as well as the ability to create leads and interaction. Digital marketing is essential for business as it has revolutionised the way of marketing services. Botswana HRDC should adopt the use of digital marketing

platforms to build relationships with stakeholders and customers and ultimately enhance its online brand visibility. This is based on the notion that digital marketing is efficient, fast and cheap to use when compared to traditional marketing platforms.

Conclusion

The current study investigated the effectiveness and efficiency of digital marketing on the promotion of Botswana HRDC services. This study brought together the collective insight from the respondents on issues relating to digital marketing. This research offers a significant and timely contribution to the domain of digital marketing by identifying challenges and opportunities. Interestingly, the study provided new useful perspectives, structures and presented a number of suggestions that form the basis to enhance the use of digital marketing. The findings of the study substantiate and demonstrate that digital marketing is essential for business and that it has revolutionised the way of marketing products and services.

Moreover, the study emphasised the importance of strengthening IT security to make the digital marketing platforms secure and safe for users. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on the principle of inclusivity that ensures that all stakeholders, customers and clients are equally served despite existing socio-economic disparities between urban and rural stakeholders. The study also highlighted the need to keep abreast of the kind of digital technology that appeals to a wider age group. Another key finding was that the design of digital marketing platforms should be based on each generation's unique expectations, values and experiences that influence consumer behaviour. The findings of this current study demonstrated the urgent need to develop a digital marketing communications strategy.

There was a call for capacitation Botswana HRDC Marketing and Communications staff to oversee digital marketing platforms and provide monthly analytics reports and flighting/ posting schedules. Generally, the insights and strategic interventions emerging from this current study provided conceptual tools to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of digital marketing. The present study contributed to the body of knowledge and advanced the literature on the field of digital marketing in the context of Botswana. There are limitations within the current research, with an outline of the research gaps and directions for future research that can help advance knowledge within the domain of digital marketing.

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